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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: OPPOSITION REACTION TO NABATIEH TRIP AND  
U.S. OUTREACH TO SHIA

REF: A. BEIRUT 912  
[B](#). BEIRUT 919  
[C](#). BEIRUT 391  
[D](#). BEIRUT 918

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Pro-opposition media have seized on the Charge's June 18 visit to Nabatieh in southern Lebanon (Ref A) to step up criticism over U.S. policy in the region. The heart of the criticism seems to be a concerted effort by Hizballah and the opposition to sound an alarm against U.S. relationships with independent Shia, signaling Hizballah's growing uneasiness with U.S. outreach and a possible attempt to quell moderate Shia voices. Also, moderate Shia Lokman Slim told us that MPs from Saad Hariri's Future Movement met quietly with deposed mufti of Tyre Sayyed Ali al-Amin on June 22, presumably to show their support after he was ousted by Hizballah during the May clashes. End summary.

NABATIEH VISIT PROMPTS  
POLICY CRITICISM  
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[1](#)2. (C) We reported in Ref A on the visit by Charge and visiting S/P staff member on June 18 to five sites where the Embassy sponsors development, social assistance, public diplomacy and education projects in Nabatieh in southern Lebanon, with a final meeting with Amcit independent Shia Abdallah Bitar which drew protests from opposition loyalists.

Pro-opposition newspaper As-Safir's June 19 article on the visit described how the U.S. was "interfering" in Shia affairs. The following day, As-Safir, reporting further on the visit, published statements from figures in southern Lebanon criticizing U.S. policy and its relationship with Israel. For example, pro-opposition newspaper Al-Akhbar cited U.S. attempts to "resuscitate decaying southern feudalism represented by the Assad and Khalil families." (Note: The Charge met with Ahmad al-Assad on June 19, Ref B, and hosted a dinner in March that included Khalil al-Khalil, Ref C. Both are anti-Hizballah Shia figures from southern Lebanon. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) The Shia editor-in-chief of the Arabic section of NowLebanon, Okab Sakr, criticized the Embassy's Shia outreach efforts as counterproductive in a June 19 interview on Lebanon Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) television. Sakr, an independent Shia whose recent MEPI funding proposal did not

make the USG funding cut, said that the USG's "open efforts to strengthen moderate Shia make them a target for Hizballah supporters."

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTRY:  
VISIT NOT CLEARED WITH US  
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14. (C) Meanwhile, an unnamed representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared to the press on June 22 that the Charge's visit to Nabatieh was not cleared through the MFA office "in accordance with customary protocol." (Note: The Embassy does not clear its movements with the MFA, nor does any other foreign mission. Oddly, FM Salloukh made no mention of this issue June 22-23, although he spoke with Charge several times on the margins of the Nahr al Bared donors conference in Vienna. The MFA Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Georges Siam, sent a cellphone text message to Charge June 22 in which he expressed his "indignation at the accident you faced this week. Kindly accept my solidarity and support for your courageous stand along with my best wishes for your continued success and safety." End Note)

HIZBALLAH TO QUIET  
SHIA DISSIDENTS?  
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15. (C) Meanwhile, Pro-March 14 An-Nahar published a lengthy article on June 21 by Ibrahim Bayram on Hizballah's reaction to the visit. Bayram, who maintains Hizballah sources,

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writes that Hizballah is putting an end to its tolerance toward dissident Shia voices. Hizballah fears these voices, he continued, calling them the seeds of a "sahwa" (awakening) that must be nipped in the bud.

SAAD'S MPS VISIT (IN SECRET)  
DEPOSED TYRE MUFTI  
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16. (C) Reportedly, senior advisor to Saad Hariri, Ghattas Khoury, led a delegation of Future Movement MPs on June 22 to meet with deposed Shia mufti of Tyre, Sayyed Ali al-Amin. The visit, according to independent Shia activist Lokman Slim, was purposefully kept quiet. Slim said the visit was intended to demonstrate the delegation's solidarity with the religious figure, who was ousted from his position during the May clashes, presumably for his stance against Hizballah. Slim explained that Amin had said to him, "No one (Lebanese) dares to visit me publicly."

SISON